Ballona Wetlands Restoration Science Advisory Committee
Meeting Summary
November 11, 2005 10:00 – 3:00 pm

The purpose of this meeting was for the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Science Advisory Committee to provide advice on development of science-based objectives for the restoration project.

Attendees:

SAC Members	Consultants	Stakeholders
Rich Ambrose, co-chair	Jeff Haltiner	Marcia Hanscom
Eric Stein, co-chair	Jeremy Lowe	Roy VandeHoek
Mike Josselyn	Isabelle Duvivier	Rafe Sagarin
Camm Swift		Edith Read
Wayne Ferren	Consultants (phone)	Gray O'Connor
John Dorsey	Jeff Thomas	Jamie King
Shelly Luce	Art Barnett	Don Geisinger
Phillipa Drennan		John Hodder
		Jennifer Vranilovich
SAC Members (phone)	Project Team	Lisa Fimiani
Ken Schwartz	Mary Small	Gin Ingram
Jon Callaway		

Approval of Operational Procedures

After the last meeting, the operational procedures were redrafted and sent out to all the SAC members. Eric reviewed the changes and the operational procedures were adopted.

Overview of Goals and Objectives

Purpose of Goals and Objectives

Jeff Haltiner summarized the purpose for the project goals and objectives:

- developing a common framework for developing and comparing project alternatives
- providing the foundation for evaluating project success

The goal for today's discussion is to make sure that the goals and objectives include all appropriate issues. Once the opportunities and constraints analysis is further along we will refine the objectives and begin prioritizing them.

Background

Mary Small reviewed the goals and objectives that were originally developed by the PMT and the summarized stakeholders input to date. Small noted that she is still receiving comments from the stakeholders, the purpose of today's meeting is to refine objectives so that they can be presented to the stakeholders for additional input.

Role of the Science Advisory Committee
Stein indicated that it will probably take several iterations on these goals and objectives. He stated that the purpose of this meeting is to develop broad objectives and not to get too specific at this time.

Review, Refine and Endorse Sub-Goals and Specific Objectives
Haltiner noted that the project area does not include the entire ecosystem as defined in the glossary. However, it was agreed that we should work within the ecosystem context.

- Change the title to Ballona Wetlands Restoration Goals and Objectives, not Ballona Ecosystem. The introductory paragraph will include a statement that the Ballona wetlands project will promote and assist in the restoration of the larger ecosystem.
- Develop a figure that labels all of the areas of the project and its related landscape, including: Ballona Estuary, Del Rey Lagoon, wetland, dunes, ballona lagoon, Venice canals; project boundary, channel, etc. Definitions for specific areas will be added to the glossary.
- Add a subgoal to the Goal 1 that discusses integration into the landscape context.

Biodiversity
Discussed whether biodiversity be a goal separate from habitat, decided it should. Guild and "full complement" should be defined in the glossary. Discussion of importance of protecting existing biodiversity within the system, does not mean we have to maintain the species where they are today (they could be moved).

- Reword subgoal to include concept of restoring and protecting multiple levels of diversity.
- Group into two objectives:
    - Support rare and endangered species
    - Support broad representation of native taxa across multiple trophic levels
- Move invasive species management under sustainability subgoal.

Habitat
The subgoal states 'ecosystem' but it should be focused on wetland and estuarine habitats. The subgoal includes functions, but the objectives are a list of habitat types. Focus on what is appropriate to this site; don't force habitats onto the site. Insert the landscape guiding principles into these objectives; restore spatial relationships and connectivity based on historic or regional reference sites. Stein suggested wording for the subgoal to "capture a functional array of naturally occurring habitats", with four objectives

- Balancing the ability to support habitat types in light of regional needs.
- Establishing spatial balance of habitat types within the site
- Appropriate edge habitat and connectivity to adjacent parts of the Ballona Ecosystem.
- Supporting landscape level functions such as migratory birds habitat; nursery functions; etc.

Concern that the landscape ecology principles prescribe how not what. These objectives should be edited in accordance with the comments received. It was also decided that the habitat sub-goal should be listed before the biodiversity sub-goal.

Hydrology and Water Quality
Should hydrology be a sub-goal or a tool to achieve habitat goals? Decided to make a broader subgoal: "Physical and Chemical Processes" that would include:

- Tidal circulation and inundation

- Manage surface and subsurface freshwater in-flows to support desired habitats
- Maintain and support sediment transport regime that supports desired wetland functions
- Re-establish a dynamic range of hydrologic conditions (intensity and duration) to support ecosystem processes
- Establish and maintain biogeochemical processes representative of natural wetland ecosystems

Flood protection considered to be a social objective or commitment, not an ecosystem objective. However, flooding as an ecosystem function should be included in this subgoal.

Water quality is included in this sub-goal as it relates to ecosystem function. There was a discussion of adding a goal about improving water quality through this project. The SAC agreed that improving water quality is not an ecosystem goal of the project and it may not be wholly consistent with the ecosystem goals. Use of land for water quality improvement may preclude or limit areas that can be used as habitat, which is the primary goal of the restoration project. If water quality is a goal it should be addressed as a social value with a statement that it may conflict with the broader ecosystem goals.

Ecological Sustainability
Objectives should related to protection of the site and long-term management
- Accommodate potential sea-level rise
- Self-sustaining, natural system, minimize mechanical, artificial structures to manage site conditions
- Protect against current and future adverse effects of nuisance species, invasive species, disease vectors, feral predators, etc.
- Water quality: protect site from adverse effects of contaminants in influent water or sediment

Hydrodynamic Modeling Recommendation
Since the last SAC meeting, there was another conference call of the modeling subcommittee and a draft revised recommendation was distributed for review. The consultant team's revised memo recommends the use of EPA's EFDC model because it will better coordination with the Corps Ballona project and will allow for better consideration of pollutant loadings. However, because PWA has not used this model before, it recommends developing the model for a portion of the wetland first to ensure that EFDC can handle the flow control structure, drying of the internal channel/wetland, and that input/output/visuals can be produced in an efficient manner. If it functions appropriately, the model will be extended to the whole project area. If there are problems, PWA will bring it back to the SAC for further discussion.

Action Items
Stein summarized:
- Adoption of Operational Procedures
- Worked on the overall goals and objectives during this meeting
    - create figure labelling areas within Ballona Ecosystem and Wetlands
    - Reorganize and revise goals and objectives (see notes above)
    - Decided not to put water quality treatment as an ecosystem goal; but it was placed as a possible societal subgoal.

- Accepted the revised recommendation re hydrologic modeling

Ambrose stated that the implementation commitments need to be discussed and should be discussed at the next meeting. Project phasing will need to be discussed in this section as well.

Project Update
Lowe reviewed the progress of existing reports and existing conditions analysis. He asked that additional reports be submitted to him and that PWA is making electronic copies of all documents for the library.

Next Meeting to be held sometime in January 2006. Precise date to be scheduled over email. Potential topics for the next meeting include:

- Baseline monitoring, in the context of regional monitoring
- Data collection
- Opportunities and constraints analysis

Public Comment

Hanscom:

- Good to mention the light footed clapper rail and she is encouraged that this species is being considered. Wants to be sure we plan for assuring that mesopredators like coyote be considered.
- Increasing size of ballfields is only a concern of a few people and that the funding was for ecosystem function. She is working on finding another place for ballfields.
- Concerned about nesting areas for the great blue heron.
- Wants to be sure that project consider upland habitat El Segundo Dunes, Baldwin Hills, prairie habitats for example.
- Ballona Channel should be included in the purview of the project that is part of the ownership of the state.
- Pollution may not necessarily be a threat to the wetlands.
- Wants to assure sustainability and reduce need for long term maintenance.
- Mosquitoes are part of a natural system and should not be considered a nuisance species.
- Wants the SAC to look at data that show salt marsh can treat stormwater and we should look into this.
- Encourages the team to develop an update on species considerations.

Van deHoek:

- Appreciates opportunity to speak at the SAC meetings; meeting with agency advisors not open to the public.
- Sierra Club's view is that habitat and endangered species comes ahead of water quality. Believes that toxics going into Santa Monica Bay are not as big an issue as some claim.
- Estuarine definition is good, but he believes that upland should be in equal status as the estuarine status. Uplands include dunes, prairies and scrub.
- 1908 report by Mendelhal (USGS) discusses artesian wells and this groundwater source should be considered. This could be used for creating additional freshwater habitat.
- The marina is potentially good fish habitat and he believes that enough deepwater habitat has been created in the region, include the marina in the definition of the Ballona Ecosystem concept. Consider Tidewater Goby for reintroduction. Striped mullet is a concern of his and should be included in the project goals and objectives. Raptors have fed on this species. Had four ospreys in this region that may have been utilizing this species. Mike Horn believes striped mullet can be a key species to the system.
- He does not believe that Ballona wetlands were historically a full tidal system. He believes that it closed off from the sea from May to September and it became hypersaline in the summer.
- Clapper rail does not require tidal flow—there is a misconception that they only use tidal marsh and cordgrass. They also use pickleweed habitat. He believes that 400-500 pairs of clapper rail were found in tules at the Salton Sea. The currently largest population in the state is in Anaheim Bay and they use cattails and tules during high tide.
- Believes that mosquitoes are a good species and are prey for frogs.
- Biodiversity does not necessarily mean lots of species. He thinks that we need to consider those species which support unique habitat conditions. Doesn't want to separate Ballona Creek from the wetlands.

- Believes that any plant or animal on the sensitive species should be included just as any federally listed species as they may become listed in the future. We should also consider recovering Ventura milk vetch here.
- Suggested a tidal channel in Area A, could cross at Fisherman's village and run parallel to Fiji Way. Round sting ray use the existing channel into Area A.
- Likes the MIKE model and doesn't believe we need to coordinate with the Corps on the modeling. MIKE has better graphics ability. Doesn't think that the water quality is the primary issue.

Hodder:

- He is conducting a study of the fill soils at Ballona wetlands to investigate contaminants, has a permission letter from DFG.
- Is impressed with the hydrologic engineering goals and objectives; but wants to know where the biological baseline data is? How will it figure into the priority and order of steps for the restoration. Needed for the planning study and we can't ignore the existing biological data.
- What criteria will be used to judge habitat conversion from one area to another. Concerned about vernal pool areas he has identified and how they will be considered as a constraint? These areas are small and disturbed and how will they be judged in terms of importance. The bibliography is weak at this point.

Small stated that the consultants are pulling together the data at this point and the meeting in January will cover this issue. The base line data will then be used towards developing the design alternatives. Specific species surveys will not be started until the data gaps analysis is completed but a vegetation map is going to be prepared by DFG.
Haltiner remarked that the project will include an analysis of existing conditions and will take into account protection of valuable habitats. Some tradeoffs will need to be considered and will have to be decided by the larger group.

Fimiani:

- Docent at the Freshwater Marsh has seen significant increase in the use of the marsh by bird species, including breeding species.
- Are plans for expansion of the riparian corridor being included into this plan? Build on the momentum of the success of the freshwater marsh. How incorporating riparian corridor into design plans?

O'Connor:

- Add active use into the recreational goals, possible additional funding sources.
- Active recreation could be compatible with some special plants.
- Convert D to community serving open space.